

travel

A really wild time on the water

Whether you want action-packed adventure on the water or just a chance to chill out and enjoy the sun, heading for the Greek island of Lefkas during festival time guarantees fun for everyone. OLI FRANZEN and EMMA KNIGHTS have a whale of a time at Wildwind.

The starting gun rang out across the turquoise waters of Vassiliki Bay and we wrestled our boat through a melee of battling yachts. Weaving our way through the start line, amongst booming cries of 'water' and 'starboard', we sheeted in tight and set sail for a return race around a distant island.

My girlfriend Emma and I, together with Norfolk sailing instructor Charlie Ellington, had formed 'Team Norwich' to represent our fine city at the Vassiliki Watersports Festival.

The regatta is organised annually by Simon Morgan who owns Wildwind sailing holidays where we spent a wonderful week sharpening our skills before the festival's yacht race.

What sets the Vassiliki Watersports Festival apart from other resort-based regattas is that it draws helmsman from all over the world, including internationally acclaimed sailors such as Beijing 2008 Olympic medalists Sofia Bekorou, Sofia Papadopoulou and Virginia Kravarioti, in an array of mono-hull, catamaran and windsurfing classes.

And when the sun goes down there is still plenty of excitement to be had with an action-packed programme of events including an international Miss Bikini pageant and some crazy freestyle BMX stunt riding.

The regatta's setting is quite literally a sailor's paradise - for Wildwind is located right on the beach with a majestic mountain backdrop and near perfect sailing conditions. And all Wildwind guests are encouraged to enter the festival regardless of ability, giving amateurs a rare opportunity to compete against world class sailors.

A Wildwind sailing holiday is a pure nirvana for the dedicated sailor, but it also offers so much more too.

Whether you go to Wildwind for the festival or visit at any other time, there is always something for the whole family. There is excellent sailing tuition for beginners and even a kids club for younger sailors to develop new skills in safety.

And if Mum wants to indulge in some quality 'me' time on dry land while Dad and the kids mess around in boats Wildwind's Healthy Options programme is perfect. This offers a range of well being treats including yoga, pilates and massage, with an ethos of 'do as much or as little as you like'.

Even the wind at Wildwind seems keen to please everyone. In the morning there is a light onshore breeze which is great for children and beginners while the wild cross shore wind, known locally as Eric and which kicks in each afternoon, provides a roller coaster ride of excitement for the more experienced sailor.

And the resort's friendly, warm and welcoming atmosphere, far nicer and more intimate than what you would expect to find in a larger chain resort, is the icing on a very laid back cake.

It was the third year Emma and I had visited Wildwind, and the staff welcomed us like a member of the family returning home.

We also recognised a number of guests who had been to Wildwind before. Not that that was unusual. Wildwind is rather like Norfolk, once people discover this understated gem, they don't want to go anywhere else.

The resort itself is a small and simple



affair with accommodation being run by two separate Greek families who also serve breakfast, lunch and snacks. One family runs a beach bar with beautiful sea views, while the other has a pool bar which is the best place to float around with a cocktail and rest your limbs after a hard day at sea.

On the beach there is a mouth-watering selection of boats. Wildwind specialises in catamarans, with a strong fleet of Hobie 15 training boats and the classic Hobie 16 beach cats, as well as Formula 18 Hobie Tigers and Formula 20 Hobie Foxes that deliver astonishing performance.

For mono-hull sailors there are plenty of single-handed Laser Ones and beginners Picos to enjoy, while people wishing to sail with a friend can try a wide range of dinghies from the beginner's Laser 2000 to the more advanced Laser 3,000, 4,000 and Vago.

Guests who prefer to enjoy larger, more stable boats will love the powerful Laser SB3 keel boat. In contrast the super high performance 49er and Laser 5,000 deliver a rare chance to experience seriously tippy

double trapeze action. On the first morning sailors are split into ability groups, paired up with instructors, and asked how they would like to develop their skills.

Although most of my sailing experience is with single-handed Laser Ones, I decided to spend the mornings having a go at catamaran sailing with Emma.

I soon discovered that an entirely new skill set was required. Sailing cats is much more about powering into turns and backing jibs and with the addition of a traveller there is another bit of rope to think about!

Emma and I both thoroughly enjoyed the experience. I was wowed by the raw power that only a cat can produce while Emma loved sunbathing on the cat's trampoline and swinging out like a gymnast on the trapeze.

In the afternoons the strong cross-shore wind kicked in and things got even more exciting.

While Emma joined in with the Healthy Options activities I had an absolute scream stretching my skills in storming winds

onboard the single handed Laser mono-hull. I don't think I could ever tire of the liberating feeling of leaning right out of the boat though a wall of spray, struggling to keep the Laser balanced, while the hull hums on the plane.

In the evenings we took a short walk along the beach to enjoy a meal in the romantic little fishing village of Vassiliki.

While Vassiliki relies on tourism it hasn't been spoilt by it and there are some beautiful waterside restaurants and ice cream parlours.

Stelios Restaurant stands out from the crowd for fabulous traditional Greek cuisine with warm, friendly service.

Wildwind also puts on its own themed evenings. The night not to be missed is the legendary Wildwind barbecue which draws people from miles around.

Wildwind's sailing instructors cook up a feast while an excellent live band gets everyone dancing into the early hours.

The laid-back Wildwind race day which is held for guests on the penultimate day of their holiday is a fun way for sailors to test

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the skills they have learned all week. But for us, with the Vassiliki Watersports Festival yacht race looming the following day, it felt like a dress rehearsal for something more serious.

In the morning Emma and I raced a catamaran together and were pleased to have made it around the course without embarrassing ourselves too much, while in the afternoon I finished a respectable fourth in a Laser One mono-hull.

Buoyed by a decent result at the Wildwind race day Emma and I decided to stretch our legs with fellow Norwich boy and Wildwind sailing instructor Charlie on a sporty SB3 keel boat and enter 'Team Norwich' into the festival's day-long yacht race.

After a perfectly timed start across the line we decided to take advantage of Charlie's local knowledge of the winds and hug the coast on a port tack, while all the

other yachts took a starboard course.

Unfortunately Mother Nature conspired against us and the wind dropped leaving us floundering while the other boats carried on in open water.

But we were soon back in the race when we turned out of the bay and were able to use our secret weapon, the SB3's superb asymmetric spinnaker.

This billowed like a giant kite above the bows of the boat making our SB3 surge forward. The feeling of planing through the water for miles to a distant island was terrific and definitely the longest spinnaker run of my life.

We rounded the island and after a tight-fought tack home we crossed the finish line in a respectable fifth position.

We weren't in the money but we felt that we had done the folks back home in Norwich proud!

The Healthy Options View - Emma Knights



If you want to kick-start a healthy new you but dread the idea of a strict fitness regime or health camp then Wildwind's Healthy Options programme may just be perfect for you.

It is the third year I have taken part in the programme and each time it has left me feeling wonderfully refreshed and rejuvenated.

There are a whole host of activities on offer including pilates, yoga, fitness classes, bike rides, walks and more. But as well as getting fit the programme is also about relaxing and soaking up the Greek sunshine too, and guests are warmly invited by the friendly instructors to do as much or as little as they like.

So if you want to take part in everything then great, but if you want to skip a few sessions and indulge in a lazy afternoon by the pool then that's perfectly fine too.

The twice daily yoga classes, suitable for both beginners and intermediates,

are perhaps my favourite part of the programme.

Teacher Karen Simper's relaxed classes do a great job of helping the stresses and strains of life back home slip away with every yoga session giving you an enormous sense of wellbeing.

And then there is the heavenly complementary massage, a real treat and extremely relaxing.

The programme also includes a number of excursions enabling you to explore Lefkas' stunning mountainous landscape and, my personal favourite, an aqua safari which takes you to a number of snorkelling sites where you can peer into the crystal clear water and marvel at the intriguing rock formations and marine life below.

The Healthy Options programme can be enjoyed on its own or you can combine it with sailing like I did.

And I found the exhilarating sailing coupled with the invigorating and relaxing Healthy Options activities were a winning combination!

Late deals

with Derek James

Deal of the Day From Norwich

Majorca. Oct 22. 7 nights, self-catering, 3* accommodation, Cala Bona, from £310pp. Based on four sharing, a reduction of £100. Call TNA on 01603 428800.

From Norwich

Menorca. Oct 19. 7 nights, half-board, 3* hotel, Arenal de Castell, from £390.

Corfu. Oct 23. 7 nights, half-board, 3* hotel, Sidari, from £419.

Majorca. Oct 22. 7 nights, half-board, 4* hotel, Playa Muro, from £455

From Stansted

Cyprus. Oct 21. 7 nights, self-catering, 2* accommodation, Ayia Napa, from £249pp based on four sharing.

Rhodes. Oct 21. 7 nights, b&b, 3* hotel, b'ia, from £310.

Egypt. Nov 1. 7 nights, all-inclusive, 3* hotel, Nama Bay, from £461. Call TNA on 01603 428800.

Red Sea savings.

Red Sea Holidays is offering 7 nights, half-board, at the 4* Gazala Gardens, Sharm El Sheikh, for £489 - a reduction of £106. The price includes return flights from Gatwick on October 29, transfers and late room check-out.

Call 0845 313 9949 or visit www.redseaholidays.co.uk

Barcelona...for under £200.

neftights.com is offering two nights staying at the 3* Sagrada Familia hotel in Barcelona on a room only basis for £179. Prices includes return flights with Iberia from Heathrow. Valid for departures in November.

Monte Carlo without going bust.

Pure Luxury has reduced a short break in Monte Carlo by £100. It will now cost £359 for three nights at the Fairmont with breakfast for £359, that includes return flights with BA from Heathrow between November 8 and December 18.

More details on 0844 472 0100 or visit www.pureluxuryholidays.co.uk

Saving big bucks in Bulgaria

Borovets is the biggest and most popular skiing resort in Bulgaria, situated on the northern slopes of the Mousala ridge with three areas offering plenty of scope for all abilities.

Leave on January 30 with Ingrams and stay at the 3* Malina Village Chalets for seven nights self-catering, and it will cost you £150.50pp, a saving of £149pp. The price is based on six sharing and includes flights from Gatwick.

For this and other good deals of skiing holidays in Austria, Italy and Switzerland. Call Ingrams Reservations on 020 8780 4447 or visit www.inghams.co.uk



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Prices for a week's sailing at Wildwind, including accommodation and return flights from Gatwick to Preveza, start at £589 per person. The Watersweets Festival is usually at the end of June.

Prices for a one-week Healthy Options programme, including accommodation and flights, start at £479 per person. There is also the option to do a windsurfing package.

For more information visit: www.wildwind.co.uk and www.healthy-option.co.uk